

Pioneer Press, January 13, 2005

Three Stevenson High School students and their history teacher were pleased at the indictment announced last week in a decades-old civil right case the students helped publicize in an award-winning history documentary last year.

But the students said they will not let up until justice is fully served.

A grand jury in Mississippi has indicted former Ku Klux Klan member Edgar Ray Killen, now 79, in the deaths of three civil rights workers dramatized in the 1988 movie "Mississippi Burning."

James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were killed in 1964 when they went to investigate a church bombing near Philadelphia, Miss. The three had been helping with a voter registration drive.

Although 18 men were eventually tried on various charges, no one was prosecuted for the murders.

Moved by the injustice, Juniors Allison Nichols, Brittany Saltiel and Sarah Siegel selected the case for their history project. They interviewed the families of the victims, lawmakers and law enforcement officials for a documentary entitled, "We are Not Afraid."

They also spoke with Mississippi Attorney General James Hood, FBI agents and former Mississippi governor William Winter.

"We're pleased that the indictment and arrest has taken place," said Stevenson history teacher Barry Bradford, who helped the students with their project. "We hope that everybody involved is brought to justice."

There are still seven suspects who could still be arrested, he added.

"Our reaction is not one of elation, because it took three people to die for this to happen," he said. "So, we can't be overjoyed."

Siegel added their joy is tempered by the time it took to indict Killen.

She said the students can't take credit for getting Killen arrested and indicted, but they can take credit for publicizing the case.

Their documentary, which won first place at the Illinois State History Fair, caught the attention of southern media and federal lawmakers, inspiring them to call on the U.S. Department of Justice to reopen the case.

"There is no time limit on justice and justice is finally coming to Mississippi," said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, who co-sponsored a resolution asking the justice department to investigate the 40-year old murders.

Bradford interviewed Killen by phone, following the advice of the Justice Department, which had recommended the students not be allowed to interview Killen so they wouldn't be called to testify if the case went to trial. However, Bradford said the students did the rest of the work on the documentary.

"They deserve so much credit for their integrity," he said.

Bradford and the students have been contacted by at least two prime time TV news shows and the Oprah Winfrey Show. Siegel said they are being interviewed by some this week.

"We're a small part of a larger movement," Bradford said.